

4. COUGAR MANAGEMENT AND RESEARCH – BRIEFING

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Decision Page.....	<i>i</i>

"GREEN SHEET"

Meeting: May 2-3, 2008

Agenda Item 4: Cougar Management and Research – **Briefing**

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Presented By: Donny Martorello, Ph.D., Carnivore, Furbearer & Special Species Manager,
Wildlife Program

Background:

Using dogs to hunt cougar in Washington has been a controversial issue. Since the passing of a 1996 initiative banning the use of dogs, the Legislature has considered amendments to cougar hunting in five of the last eight years. This has resulted in two substantive changes; the creation of public safety cougar removals (ESSB 5001) and the creation and reauthorization of the pilot cougar season using dogs (SSB 6118 and ESHB 2438). The pilot program created a three-year cougar season that allowed hunters to use dogs to pursue or tree and kill cougar in five counties of northeast Washington (i.e., Chelan, Okanogan, Ferry, Stevens, and Pend O'reille).

The Legislative program was designed to increase public safety and protect private property. The Department was also directed to assess cougar populations in the five counties. The pilot hunts were implemented during the winters of 2004-05, 2005-06 and 2006-07. Following the third year, the Department was required to report on the findings from the pilot program and to make recommendations to the Legislature on the future use of dogs for hunting.

A final report was delivered to the Fish and Wildlife Commission and to the appropriate committees of the Legislature in January 2008. The briefing being presented is at the request of the Fish and Wildlife Commission and is a summary of the findings and recommendations contained within the report. In addition, the Department will brief the Commission on the progress and future direction of cougar research projects conducted or funded by the Department, including Project CAT, the cougar DNA project, and cougar related research being conducted by Washington State University.

Policy Issue(s) you are bringing to the Commission for consideration:

Briefing only. Policies associated with cougar hunting and cougar management are detailed in the Game Management Plan.

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

The Department has been reaching out to the general public since 2002 in an effort to gain a comprehensive understanding about public attitudes on cougar hunting. During the Game Management Plan process in 2003, over 17 public meetings were held throughout the state with over 800 people attending. In addition, two internet surveys with over 5,000 respondents, and three opinion surveys, one via mail and two via telephone, with over 3,000 respondents were conducted. During the development of the pilot cougar program, the County Commissioners for the five county areas met with local constituents before meeting on several occasions with Department staff. Informal discussions were been held between stakeholders and Department staff as well. Proposed recommendations associated with the pilot cougar program were mailed to over 900 individuals and organizations in the months prior to the Commission meeting. In every case, the organizations and individuals were informed of the opportunity to provide public testimony at Commission meetings. All of the information gained from these meetings, as well as individual letters and emails, helped in the development of cougar management strategies.

Action requested (identify the specific Commission decisions you are seeking):

None, briefing only. This is a Commission request from the November 2-3, 2007 Commission meeting.

Draft motion language:

Briefing only.

Justification for Commission action:

Briefing only.
